The Stalled Fertility Transition in Bangladesh: The Effects of Gender and Number Preferences

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Over a decade ago, Preston, Muhuri and Menken found child survival was higher for the first two boys and first girl in a family. The latter two suggested there may be "a deep-rooted set of preferences …that contradicted notions of desire for large numbers – of either sons or daughters" that contributed to decline in fertility in the late 20th century. Today it is reasonable to ask whether preference for two boys and a girl is related to the plateau in fertility. Using the 1996 Matlab Health and Socioeconomic Survey, ICDDR,B Health and Demographic Surveillance System birth records, and the 1994-2004 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Surveys, we examine parity progression for maternal cohorts according to number and gender of their children. For younger women in more recent years, parity progression is related to gender composition of siblings. Complex gender preference may well contribute to stalled fertility in Bangladesh and other countries.

Preliminary tables for

The final paper will include more detailed tables as well as individual-level analysis relating parity progression to individual characteristics, e.g. maternal education and socioeconomic status, as well as estimates of the effect on fertility of the preference for two sons and a daughter.

Table 1. Parity Progression by maternal age in 1996, number of sons and
  Residence in the Matlab Family Planning Area:
  Women who reached parity 3. Sources: MHSS and Matlab HDSS

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 No. sons|           Maternal agegroup
         |  15_24    25_34    35_44    45_54    55_hi
----------+-----------------------------------------
Not in family planning area
       0 | 0.4719   0.9297   0.9765   1.0000   0.8940
         |
       1 | 0.3725   0.8160   0.9326   0.9485   0.9698
         |
       2 | 0.6352   0.6819   0.9113   0.9450   0.9226
         |
       3 | 0.2897   0.7868   0.9602   1.0000   0.9689
         | ---------+--------------------------------
In family planning area
       0 | 0.0637   0.8076   0.9844   0.9415   1.0000
         |
       1 | 0.3591   0.5561   0.9262   0.9984   0.9513
         |
       2 | 0.2593   0.4803   0.8009   0.9620   0.9845
         |
       3 | 0.2862   0.6148   0.8461   0.9188   0.8934
         | ------------------------------------------
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The table above demonstrates that, among women 25-34 in 1996, the proportion of those who had three children going on to have a fourth child declined as the number of boys increased

except for those who had all boys. In addition, parity progression was lower overall in the family planning area.

Table 2. Parity Progression by maternal age in 1996, number of sons and
        Residence in the Matlab Family Planning Area:
        Women who reached parity 2

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  ----------------------------------------------------
  No. sons |                   agegrp
           |   15_24    25_34    35_44    45_54    55_hi
  ---------+------------------------------------------
  Not in family planning area
         0 |  0.7522   0.8908   0.9826   0.9932   0.9608
           |
         1 |  0.4559   0.8741   0.9539   0.9829   0.9903
           |
         2 |  0.5603   0.8110   0.9577   0.9633   0.9819
  ---------+------------------------------------------
  In family planning area
         0 |  0.6387   0.8902   0.9512   1.0000   0.9787
           |
         1 |  0.4587   0.8656   0.9075   0.9628   0.9638
           |
         2 |  0.5538   0.8873   0.9120   0.9907   0.9859
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Among women aged 15-24 in 1996 who had at least 2 children, the proportion going on to have a third child was lowest among those who had one of each sex. It may be that sex preference is changing and will, in the future, lead to decline in fertility closer to a TFR of 2.